

FEMA Urges Patience While Search Continues for Stranded Victims and Supplies Stream In

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Michael D. Brown, Department of Homeland Security's Principal Federal Officer for Hurricane Katrina response and head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, called for patience in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

"Response operations are being conducted over a disaster area of nearly 90,000 square miles – the biggest single disaster response in our nation's history. This is a catastrophic event, and it takes time to get assets to victims over this large area," said Brown. "We ask for patience from individuals who may be uncomfortable but are safe while we conduct search and rescue efforts for those who are stranded and without commodities."

To date, Federal response activities include:

- The sheltering and care of more than 91,000 hurricane victims. FEMA is supporting state partners, the American Red Cross and voluntary agencies, in ensuring that victims of the storms are in safe shelters with essential life-sustaining commodities. As of today, people are in 275 shelters in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas.
- The rescue of more than 4,800 people by FEMA Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) teams, the U.S. Coast Guard, and other federal, state and local rescue teams. All 28 of FEMA's US&R task forces have been deployed in response to Hurricane Katrina. Fourteen task forces and two Incident Support Teams are working in Louisiana and Mississippi and the remaining task forces are enroute. Eight swift water teams from California are also deployed making a total of approximately 1,800 US&R responding to this disaster.
- The deployment of nearly 1,200 National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) personnel to support medical facilities and hospitals in Louisiana and Mississippi which are not fully operational. Teams are staged near disaster areas for immediate and rapid deployment further into the disaster zone once it is safe to do so. NDMS teams are also coordinating the transport of medical needs victims from New Orleans to Houston.
- The coordination of nearly 16,000 law enforcement personnel including National Guardsmen, and federal, state and local police officers being sent to the stricken areas.
- Convoys of food, water and ice which are arriving hourly in impacted areas.
- The evacuation of thousands from New Orleans to Texas. FEMA has contracted for more than 650 buses to expedite the state-ordered evacuation.
- President Bush has authorized 100-percent reimbursement to Louisiana for debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance. The government normally pays 75 percent of these costs.

Affected individuals in declared counties can register online for disaster assistance at www.fema.gov or call FEMA's toll-free registration line 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) – TTY 800-462-7585, hours. Victims are encouraged to register on-line due to the possibility of high call volume. If registering by phone, owners of commercial properties and residents with only minor losses are urged to wait a few days before calling so those whose homes were destroyed or heavily damaged can be served first. Phone lines are open 24-hours, 7 days a week.

FEMA prepares the nation for all hazards and manages federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates mitigation activities, trains first responders, works with state and local emergency managers, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration. FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on March 1, 2003.